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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8624
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5851
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3069
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0476
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3268
RUEHM/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3712
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5054
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003141

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2017
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL BL
SUBJECT: CONFLICT IN BOLIVIA: NO END IN SIGHT

REF: A. LA PAZ 3078

1B. LA PAZ 3118

Classified By: EcoPol chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary
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11. (C) With the ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) poised to reconvene the Constituent Assembly perhaps as early as November 30 in the La Paz area or other friendly terrain, and the opposition stronghold of Santa Cruz stating it will declare defacto autonomy December 15, a cessation in Bolivia's recent cycle of violence and turmoil seems unlikely. Even with police protection, opposition Constituent Assembly delegates have reason to fear for their safety if the MAS convenes the Assembly at a less than friendly site or surrounded by MAS supporters. Some in the opposition have expressed their interest in attending to prevent the MAS from fully approving its constitution within the Assembly; but, without nearly complete (which is unlikely) attendance they will fail. Three different drafts of the MAS constitution are in circulation, no one seems to know exactly which draft the MAS approved "en grande" (general terms) on November 24.

12. (C) Rumors are running rampant within La Paz. What is clear is that the government is prepared to take extraordinary means to push forward their goal to extend Evo's stay in office beyond his current five year term. News outlets and one Embassy contact reported the government used an air force plane to bring an alternate Senator to La Paz November 28, so that he could vote on new legislation impacting the Constituent Assembly while pro-MAS groups physically prevented the opposition from entering Congress. A delegation of European Union ambassadors held a breakfast with President Morales November 29, but left the meeting unconvinced the President would seek a peaceful resolution to the current volatile political situation. End Summary.

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MAS Offers Lions Den as Assembly Site
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¶3. (C) The MAS appears poised to reconvene the Constituent Assembly perhaps as early as November 30. El Alto, where President Morales routinely registers a 90 percent approval rating, is the preferred venue in La Paz department, although others say the Congress building might be used.

¶4. (C) Emboff spoke to a La Paz PODEMOS Constituent Assembly member November 29 who explained that the La Paz delegation from PODEMOS was prepared to go to the next session(s) of the Constituent Assembly in order to stop the MAS from approving their constitution article-by-article. Under this scenario PODEMOS would need to project a united front; PODEMOS delegates from Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca and other opposition departments would have to participate which in recent days some have ruled out completely. In fact, on November 29, PODEMOS deputy Carlos Pablo Klinksy from Santa Cruz announced his department would declare its autonomy December 15. PODEMOS would also need the support of smaller opposition parties to muster the necessary one-third to block the MAS' article-by-article vote.

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Three Constitutions Better than One
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¶5. (SBU) Violating numerous Constituent Assembly procedural and voting rules and without even reading the contents of their constitutional document the MAS delegates approved the MAS' draft constitution "en grande" (in general terms) on November 24 (ref A). Not surprisingly, given that the full text was never distributed to the voting delegates, there is now a minor controversy brewing over which version of the MAS constitution was approved. La Paz daily newspaper La Prensa, published a version of the MAS constitution on November 28 which MAS Constituent Assembly delegate (and supposedly one of the constitution's main drafters) Raul Prada confirmed as the version which was voted upon November 24. However, influential MAS Senator Santos Ramirez has stated another version of the constitution, dated from November 22, is the official document. Constituent Assembly President Silvia Lazarte, also of the MAS, argues yet a third version of the MAS constitution is what passed on November 24. The differences amongst the three versions are actually trivial. This minor controversy reflects more on the chaos that surrounded the approval of the MAS constitution on November 24, and demonstrates how most delegates had very little detailed knowledge of what they were voting on. Also, by creating confusion over which is the actual text, the MAS leaves itself the option of revising it if its core constituency is unhappy with a particular article.

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Alternates Fly MASair
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¶6. (SBU) According to La Paz daily newspaper La Prensa, the government facilitated the travel of the two "suplente" (alternate) Senators -- Abraham Cuellar and Andres Heredia) both of whom were critical to the MAS's strategy of a pulling together quorum on November 27 without the presence of the opposition. Pro-MAS groups successfully blocked almost all opposition Congressional members from entering Congress November 27. As a result, the MAS was able to force through legislation regarding the functioning of the Constituent Assembly and the MAS pension program "Renta Dignidad" without the opposition's presence (ref B).

¶7. (C) There are conflicting reports on how Abraham Cuellar, alternate to Senate President Jose Villavicencio (UN party, Pando), arrived in La Paz for the November 27 Congressional vote. Some press accounts claim Cuellar was escorted by police from his home in Cobija, Pando to Riberalta, Beni where he boarded a Bolivian air force plane

to fly to La Paz. Another press account states that Cuellar road in an ambulance from Cobija to Riberalta and then flew in the President's plane to La Paz. Cuellar's wife, has denied both press accounts. According to an Embassy FSN in Cobija, Cuellar flew on an air force Cessna from Cobija to Riberalta, where he picked up another air force plane which took him to La Paz. Pandinos angry with his splitting with the UN party to vote with the MAS, torched Cuellar's house.

¶8. (SBU) La Prensa reported that the government paid for Andres Heredia's -- alternate to Roger Pinto (PODEMOS, Pando)) trip to La Paz from Brazil. Heredia denies the claim, asserting that he paid for his own trip, and that he flew to La Paz on November 25. Heredia apparently told La Prensa that since he broke with PODEMOS in 2006, he now resides in La Paz and Sao Paolo, Brazil, choosing not to live in his Pando home for fear of attacks.

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EU Meets Evo to No Avail
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¶9. (U) European Union ambassadors met with President Evo Morales this morning to deliver in person their November 25 communique in response to the violence in Sucre November 23-24. German Ambassador Erich Richter addressed the press following the meeting hinting that the EU might be willing to play a role in reducing tensions. Richter stated, "We are willing to cooperate in this political process, but only if parties here have the will. We are prepared to help as we can, at the request of the parties (MAS and opposition)."

¶10. (C) The British Ambassador told our Ambassador he found the two hour meeting with the President, the Vice President, Minister of the Presidency and Minister of Justice "unsatisfactory." There was no real response to the EU's concerns about the evolving situation, instead both the President and Vice President described a long history of injustice in Bolivia and blamed the opposition for rejecting the government's efforts to broker a deal. Evo referred to "plots from abroad" but when asked by the Spanish Ambassador if he had any proof, Morales did not. The Danes seemed irritated that Evo kept praising Venezuelan assistance but made no mention of Europe's aid.

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Comment
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¶11. (C) The President's response to the Europeans is perhaps the most telling; even with a foreign audience that wishes to diminish tensions, Evo sees no need to strike a more conciliatory tone. That there is "no willingness to negotiate" and that "more conflict is inevitable" are about the only two points the MAS and opposition can agree on. End Comment.

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